Gender mainstreaming in higher education: Experiences from Africa

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Abstract
Locating gender mainstreaming debates in higher education curricular will help any country to move towards more systematic approaches and broader understanding of the dynamics at play in historical space and time. Gender mainstreaming in education implies making gender dimension explicit and considering concerns and constrains male and female students experience resulting in quality of outcome. This implies recognizing gender differences as an underlying factor in policy issues. This paper reports on identified policy issues and experiences of four African countries on mainstreaming initiatives in education. Findings from action research and experience sharing focus group discussions in three countries show among others, that epistemological pedagogical issue is being ignored, especially teaching practice, learning materials and administrative aspects making it necessary to enhance lecturer capacity and review educational policies in the Africa curricula.

Key Words: Mainstreaming, Gender, Higher learning, Challenges, Africa, Policy.

Introduction
Gender is one of the key tenets of development. This paper acknowledges that gender issues manifest across broad societal organisations but chooses to focus its discussion on gender issues in institutions of higher learning as a factor that affect quality of education in Africa. Mathabe (2006) notes that various investigations into gender profiles using disaggregated data occur in existence of gender gaps in male and female representation in diverse university structures and student graduation numbers. A gender gap of 10% in sub Saharan developing countries where 54% of girls do not complete primary education and 17% go on to secondary education was noted (UNICEF, 2003). The 1989 World Conference on Higher education discussed issues of women in higher education and noted the significance of gender in development and its inclusion in policy debates. If institutions of higher learning especially universities are to be accepted as institutions that lead as role models for democracy, then they should be engines of gender mainstreaming and practice democratic principles. This paper therefore argues that it is not enough to focus on quantitative aspects of gender such as gender parity.

Higher education is the threshold where future decision-makers and policy makers receive training and are exposed to principles (Turmaine, 2009). But quality education can only be achieved by addressing issues of gender equality and gender equity. This paper was motivated by the worrying observation that although there is awareness on gender inequalities in space and policies, much evidence of gender mainstreaming indicators of change are being realised in all African institutions of higher learning. These include changes in attitude, policies on gender being developed at institutional level and being implemented or monitored. The current debate on mainstreaming gender in universities and gender responsive university teaching is not being researched on or put on the agenda for debate.

Several authorities (UN, 2011; Günberg, 2011; UNESCO, 2010, Turmaine, 2009; Morley, 2007) concur with the South African Pro Vice chancellor, Professor Mathabe (2006) who observed that practically gender issues still remains peripheral to what are considered to be important and urgent issues in institutions of higher learning. However, gender debate in universities cannot be isolated from broader political, social and economic contexts (Mathabe, 2006:2). Tsitsi Dangarembwa’s novel Nervous Conditions interrogates Traditional African policies and practices that recommended the education of the boy child as the natural head of the family which marginalised the education of the girl child as she is socialised for marriage.

The fact remains however, that the debates on gender issues cannot be isolated from disparities in primary and secondary schooling, culture, and other socio-economic relations that govern society. This is why locating gender mainstreaming debates in higher education curricular helps any country to move towards broader understanding of the dynamics at play in historical space and time (Mathabe, 2006:2) and more systematic approaches to education. This has a serious implication on the quality of teaching and learning in institutions of higher learning. This paper reports on the shared experiences of African institutions of higher learning in mainstreaming gender in teacher education curricular.

Theoretical framework

Gender mainstreaming
Gender is an inclusive concept which not only entails what men and women do in society and how they relate socially, but also embraces cultural ideas and interpretations about their ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ and the structural inequalities which emanate from these differences (Stolen, 1991; Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000). Buckingham-Hatfield (2000) goes on to argue that gender equality demands interventions that close gender gaps that exist between males and females in all sectors including the education sector. A difference in meaning to ‘gender equality’ entails different intervention frameworks and actions.
The SADC Protocol considers gender equality as equal enjoyment of rights and the access to opportunities and outcomes, including resources by men and women. According to Chenge (2003) gender equality entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality does not mean that men and women are equal because they are not the same and will always be different. Their rights, responsibilities and opportunities depend on whether they are born male or female. Higher institutions worldwide including universities for example, have the unconvincing privilege of remaining the most male-dominated establishments in relation to career development. That means their gender interests and practical needs are different. This is clearer in educational to career development. That means their gender interests and practical needs are different. This is clearer in educational contexts. How women access education, perform and work towards achieving their educational goals is different to that of men. Women’s efforts are affected by such environmental factors as institutional policies, distance, time tabling and position in society.

The concept of gender mainstreaming is defined and interpreted differently resulting in a significant degree of confusion within practitioners about how to go about it. Readings on the evolution of this concept dates back to the 1980’s United Nations Decade for women. The fourth World conference on women in Beijing (1995) pushed the gender mainstreaming agenda to international levels. The Beijing Platform for action brought the need for mainstreaming gender in all sectors focusing on areas such as political, economic and social sphere. The ultimate goal is gender equality , where woman and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

The concept was reinforced in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) agreed Conclusions (1997/2 and the 23rd Special session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2000. Gender mainstreaming got popularity in the Gender and Development (GAD) discourse, as it adopts a transformative process and practice that seeks to engage and benefit men and women by systematically integrating explicit attention to issues of sex and gender in all aspects of an organisation’s work (Woodford-Berger, 2004:66). Mainstreaming gender concerns can be integrated in the analysis of problems faced by a particular sex that then informs policy and practice (integrationist approach). Such an approach is the agenda setting or using the transformative and integrationist approaches characterised by monitoring and evaluation tools, frameworks and checklists (Mukhopadhyay, 2004:96). A transformative approach focuses on altering the development agenda by creating the demand for change with introduction of women’s concerns in relation to their position (Moser, 1993).

**Justification of the study**

Just as Günberg, (2011:7) argues, paying attention to gender is an intelligent way of looking at life. If curricular deals with processes in which learning takes place, then it becomes intriguing how gender is being either ignored, pseudo included or alienated in higher education curricular. Institutions should be able to adjust their academic programmes learning environment and institutional cultures so that they can enable smooth infusion and adaption of gender sensitive knowledge and societal values.

The Beijing Platform for Action 1995 (paragraph 79) reads ... governments and other actors should promote an active visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in aol policies and programmes, so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively.

UN, 2002:13

This is why institutions of higher learning are also expected to oblige and to honour existing national, regional and international commitments on gender equality. Observers are critical about the rapid economic and technological development as African institutions have to worry about how to benefit from this globalisation. Adult and continuing education is common feature in institutions of higher learning. In most institutions of higher learning women are concentrated at the lower end of the institutional hierarchy. Critical questions then come in that require answers from leadership of institutions of higher learning. Does it really mean that African universities are lacking highly educated women with leadership qualities? What could be contribution factors to this situation? Is it the quality of education that is being offered in all African countries? These questions are more disturbing considering the number of protocols and policies that have been developed and adopted by African heads of state since the 1980s. The African National Gender Policies acknowledge that education is the foundation for economic and social development. They emphasize the need to mainstream gender in educational curricular which imply amendment of key circulars and regulations that promote gender equality. That includes having to engender budgets so that resources are allocated for gender mainstreaming in institutions. This paper bridges a gap in research which particularly focuses on gender issues in primary and secondary school education and fails to generalize findings to tertiary institutions, particularly to the teaching of the teachers of the primary and secondary schools in Africa.

**Objectives of the study**

* Identify gender related policy issues in teacher education curricular
* Explore challenges being faced by tertiary institutions in mainstreaming gender

**Methodology**

The action research that was primarily a qualitative exploratory descriptive survey collected data using mixed methods from four purposively selected English speaking African countries. Information was extracted during field work, meetings and workshops. The four countries were chosen on the basis of their being sponsored to mainstream gender in teacher education curricular by FAWE. Information was also collected using document analysis and review of relevant literature on gender mainstreaming. College policy documents and ministry of gender policies were analysed using gender
responsive pedagogy gender sensitive indicators from the GRP FAWE teacher’s manual to identify gender issues in educational curricular and learning materials. Experiential data was obtained using focus group discussions involving Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe at an experience sharing meeting and workshop. Data collected was analysed qualitatively thematically focusing primarily on policy analysis regarding gender responsive pedagogy and challenges experienced in mainstreaming gender in higher education curricular in general.

**Findings**

**Tertiary institution policy issues identified**

**Time tabling.** Lecturing and learning sessions are not fair on women. Most lectures start at 0800 hours and end at 1630 hours. Open and distance education lectures are scheduled during weekends. These are days women feel they are at home, their aids go off and they have to take over their gender roles. They have to attend lectures as well on the same days.

**Infrastructure –** Tradition shuns women who wear trousers. All institutions have chairs that are hard. With affirmative action, female students are now enrolling for previously male dominated subject areas. Female students find it uncomfortable to spend more than one hour seated on the hard based chairs. One pertinent questions was asked “…for how long can you sit still and in position without opening up and cause sexual harassment?”. Lecture blocks that were used for teaching male dominated subjects (mechanical engineering, Wood work and automotive engineering) had not yet been made user friendly for female students. Female students have to find toilets at business studies blocks.

**Industrial attachment places.** Teacher training requires students to get the practical feel of real classroom teaching. Because of financial and logistical constraints, students are expected to find attachment places within a radius of 100 km from the college in Zimbabwe and reasonable distances in other countries. Female students felt it was unfair for administrators to expect students to find attachment in places stipulated by the college. The distance is determined by administrations based on budgets allocated. Female students have to separate themselves from their families for long period (up to one year) to meet the college policy requirements. The students are not able to travel every weekend to meet their families because of financial constraints.

**Leadership position**

Traditional development theories have not facilitated the participation of women in strategic areas. There were very few female leaders in the institutions studied. One college (Zimbabwe) had one female student in its SRC and all had had no females are SRC presidents since. The issue of having women in position of power is influenced by traditional assumptions of the roles and responsibilities of women and men designed on patriarchal basis. The approach recognises that without quality gender disaggregated data, planning and programming process cannot be efficient and productive in helping the country to move forward.

The affirmative action policies are not strictly being followed. The policy is not written in institutional gender policies which in all cases did not exist hence follow up and resources for monitoring compliance are limited. That could explain why there are limited scholarships for female education. Table 1 summarizes gender policy issues identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy issue</th>
<th>Ethiopia</th>
<th>Malawi</th>
<th>Tanzania</th>
<th>Zimbabwe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gendered budgets</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Widening gender gaps in SMT subjects</td>
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<td>National gender policy</td>
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<td>Affirmative Action policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher institutional X gender policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishment of coordinating committees</td>
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<td>Institutional gender policy</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>Re-entry policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic plan for education of girls, orphans and vulnerable children</td>
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<td>National gender based violence strategy in place</td>
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FAWEEF FAWEMFA FAWETA FAWEZI

All countries present noted a presents of female student drop out. Ethiopia noted that women in the faculty of social and natural sciences, engineering faculty, college of education and teacher education were taking a lion’s share of the overall dismissal Tesfaye, (n.d). Table 2 shows factors in institutions of higher learning noted as influencing higher learning institutions female students dropping out of education in all countries under study.

**Table 2: factor leading to high school drop out**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Ethiopia</th>
<th>Malawi</th>
<th>Tanzania</th>
<th>Zimbabwe</th>
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<tr>
<td>Health related obstacles</td>
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<td>Financial constraints</td>
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<td>Sexual harassment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low self esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low self image</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter-personal relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of academic guidance and counseling services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failing to access learning materials (e.g. hand outs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failure to get academic need driven support (tutorials)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of lecturers trained in Gender responsive pedagogy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative power relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor security at institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of non traditional role models e.g. in SMT fields</td>
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</table>

Ethiopia, where their ministry of education has worked hard to increase enrolment of female students in higher institutions, female students drop out every semester every year largely because they fail to meet deadlines for submitting assignments can not manage limited time, rarely participate in class discussions due to male domination in discussions. Some female
students found it difficult to combine house management with studies. Some nursing mothers had problems of managing their babies, pregnancy and related problems. Runhare, Gordon & Njovana, (2004) found that female students drop out of college because of cultural and financial reasons. Female students have limited access to financial support such as scholarships.

The gender focal points in ministry and colleges
Ministry of high education have a gender focal persons who are loaded with other responsibilities and are not supported with a gender budget for their activities. Gender is not their core business even in the primary and secondary school ministry of education. Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) project is donor driven. The ministries have no budget for GRP. The ministry is not in a position to initiate gender related activities including policy review and training without funding. The whole GRP system was not fully owned by the ministry and that was affecting seriousness, commitment and implementation pace throughout the ministry and educational institutions in the four countries. No special qualifications are being called for in becoming gender focal persons in institutions as well as the ministry posts.

The study noted some lack of commitment by institutions as work was heavily dependent on availability of donor funding. Student orientation for teaching practice using GRP principles was schedules separately from the usual professional teaching methodology programme under Professional Development courses as this was to be done by lecturers who had been sensitized on GRP and was treated as part-time work which attracted some facilitation fees in Zimbabwe. Groups that were preparing for teaching practice attachment during the time when donor funds were not yet released therefore did not get adequate training prior to going for teaching practice. Again because GRP is donor driven and the ministry have no gender budget, the diffusion of the GRP principle to other institutions was stagnant as there are no funds for training the lecturers in other colleges and for sensitising administrators in other institutions.

Implementation of GRP in teacher training colleges
Programmatically strategies to implement gender responsive pedagogy in Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Ethiopia were lagging behind Malawi. All institutions studied had conducted some form of sensitization of lecturers on epistemologies and principles of GRP, but only Malawi had embraced the concept and had implemented GRP in their day to day lectures and professional studies courses. Project implementers in the other three countries tended to select easy gender equality indicators easy to achieve, such as number of staff trained without verifying the baseline or proposing a strategy for achieving the indicators if the baseline situation is not known. This has become a major problem in teacher training colleges where the review of assessment of teaching practice and pedagogy issues in student on attachment is yet to be done. Teaching practice policy and teaching practice pedagogy is yet to be looked at in institutions of higher learning. The aspect of how review the current assessment form to include assessment of gender responsiveness of the teaching of any subject still remained unresolved in the three countries Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Ethiopia. Malawi had developed a new assessment form which they pilot tested. Lack of commitment and enthusiasm was noted in all countries studied as the push for the activities seem to have been coming from the partnering organisations in this study FAWE rather than from institutional gender focal persons or administrators.

The confusion occurred when interest of college lecturers conflicted with the objectives of the project goals, a scenario often found when donor funds are involved in working with needs groups. All institutions studied had identified a female GRP coordinator who had no gender specific qualifications. Addition of women in GM project does not mean they have the specialist gender skills needed to put gender on the agenda. Some staff felt fully developed and had become experts from a half day sensitization workshop. That led to two steps forward and two steps back when implementation of GM was now expected to take off. Gender became superficially considered focusing more in less demanding technical aspects such as gender parity and sensitisation meetings.

Gender stereotypes begin during early education that begins at home during the socialization process through language as it is used during peer interactions. Children learn and become familiar with what parents say about men and women, their abilities, emotions and expectations. The print media has a long lasting effect on the knowledge of the child due to its authoritative nature. Often people do not question the printed word as it is taken as an authority on its own. Gender biased expressions in teaching included among others the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 Gender biased expressions in teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You can't manage that, it is for men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why you are not sweeping, are you a woman?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak up! Why are you talking like a woman?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be man enough and just do the experiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why don't you participate as boys do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She acts like a man</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4 Gendered educational terms</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gendered terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister in Charge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auto mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of teacher training material in primary education training materials referred to a mayor’s wife is a mayorees. The same materials did not show what learners would refer to as a female mayor’s husband or a farmer’s wife. The terms have serious implications about the gender that is attached to town mayors and framers or other professions. Similarly texts showed a nurse as feminine but they did not give a term for the male ‘nurse’? The nursing education curriculum has not been changed to include men, just as the ICT and engineering curriculum were
They come across these terms. Lecturers need to point out these anomalies each time they come across these terms.

**Administrative challenges in mainstreaming gender in tertiary institutions**

Brainstorming session and reports from the four countries noted the following common barriers to mainstreaming gender in educational institutions in Africa:

- Lack of political will
- Educational direct and indirect costs
- Irrelevance of teaching learning materials to student lives and gender irresponsible lecture delivery methods
- Outdated curriculum where gender stereotypes are perpetuated.
- Gender blind legal frameworks
- Unsupportive Home environments
- Curricular where gender stereotypes are perpetuated and or reinforced
- Safety concerns
- Mind sets- negative attitudes and perceptions

All countries agreed that the situation is primary school is ok but breaks up abruptly soon after when the child gets into secondary school and tertiary institutions. That creates confusion for the child as there is no continuity of the agenda. Just as we have in Zimbabwe primary schools, why should school start at 0735 hours in winter, end at 5pm what is the implication to the safety of the girl child/given the rise in school based sexual harassment. In Zanzibar, there can never be a situation of coeducation. In some cultures in Northern Africa, girls have to go to school earlier so that they finish school before their virginity is affected. That means young girls learn with older men and that prejudices their performance in class which will always then be less than the boys.

People’s attitudes are affected by their belief that when people talk about gender, they imply women or radical western feminism. Some have negative attitude because of how they perceive issues involved in gender discussions. These perceptions are brought about by the cultural beliefs. Those countries affected by lack of knowledge also indicated that most people in lower administrative posts were not aware of the issues involved in mainstreaming gender. Women in particular experience the glass ceiling effect, frustrations of working women at every level who can see where they want to go but find themselves blocked by invisible barriers. That implies that unless their level of awareness is raised, having a gender policy in place may not happen. Some institutions have prohibitive structures. Much as they would wish to contribute their ideas in developing policies they may not be invited again because of stereotypes.

**Discussion**

Abebayehu, (1998) note that Ethiopia has a situation of having a drop-out rate sometimes that exceeds the graduation rate. Ziddy, (2007) confirmed the aspect of poor time management as a factor in Tanzania colleges of education. He confirmed that students are unrealistic with their time management and fall behind in every area as a result. This is why he recommended that students should make schedules and live by them. MacKinnon, (1997) contests that women’s inferior position in society is not only a consequence of gender inequality but it is the cause of students drop in tertiary institutions. Females in Tanzania lag behind men at tertiary level because of official traditional policy augmented by traditional leaders (Mbilinyi, et al., 1991; Komuhangiro et al., 2003). Komuhangiro et al., (2003) note that the differences in male and female enrolment rate. Ziddy, (2007) confirmed the aspect of poor time management as a factor in Tanzania colleges of education. He confirmed that students are unrealistic with their time management and fall behind in every area as a result. This is why he recommended that students should make schedules and live by them. MacKinnon, (1997) contests that women’s inferior position in society is not only a consequence of gender inequality but it is the cause of students drop in tertiary institutions. Females in Tanzania lag behind men at tertiary level because of official traditional policy augmented by traditional leaders (Mbilinyi, et al., 1991; Komuhangiro et al., 2003). Komuhangiro et al., (2003) note that the differences in male and female enrolment figures in higher learning institutions of Tanzania have their roots from lower levels especially secondary school level, where most of the determination on whether or not to join higher learning is determined.

Factors such as divorce, loss of a job and or death or a spouse, leaving an abusive partner, disability and motivation to become self sufficient to overcome poverty are real life circumstances that have been identified as influencing women to rejoin tertiary education. Oddic (2005) noted that women in Ghana pursuing distance learning face career related challenges as well as reproductive role challenges of demands at home. Discussions revealed that husbands who do not trust their wives pose a threat to women engagement in meetings and group discussions which include study colleagues especially when they include male students at any time of the day. Female students fail to pursue further education after secondary school. The Zimbabwe Human Development report (2009) state that the drop out rate is higher among females (53) than males (47%). The Women’s University of Africa was launched in 2002 in Zimbabwe with a core objective of addressing gender inequality and equal opportunities for women in across Africa in tertiary education. Although it enrols about 85% female students, WUA experiences female student drop out due to cultural, social economic factors. Female students drop out because they fail.
to get funding for materials and tuition fees (Rundell and Jeniffer, 2008; Gaidzanwa, 2008) and sexual harassment.

Conclusions
This paper has summarised the key experiences of Africa in mainstreaming gender in tertiary institutions. This paper noted that countries are making efforts to eliminate gender inequalities at lower levels of education. The gap between policy and practice on the ground is wide. There is political will though there is no gender budget accompanying it. Policy development and intervention strategies are being supported by strong women networks dealing with children at primary and secondary school levels and NGOs working with institutions of higher learning such as UNESCO. Donors are willing to allocate resources necessary to sustain the mainstreaming process. This is evident in primary and secondary schools. It is hoped that this experience note will allow deeper understanding of gendered power relations in their relationship to participation of subordinate groups in fields dominated by other sexes for their own good.

Limitations of the study
Gender mainstreaming requires some form of policy analysis. Findings are based at practical level from the viewpoint of a practitioner when she was involved in the development consultancy involving needs assessment, training of lecturers and staff in GRP and experience sharing with other countries. Thus data was limited by the need to meet partner donor targets and objectives. Information was extracted during field work, meetings and workshops. Findings should therefore be viewed as thinking points as they are general broad observations and are a record of experiences made over the course of responding to terms of reference set out by the funding partner of the GRP project in Africa

Recommendations
* Institutions of higher learning need to develop institutional gender policies with clear gender guidelines.
* Improve commitment of all stakeholders involved especially the institutional leadership.
* Government should match policy formulation with resource financial support. Decision makers need to prioritise and allocate resources for gender mainstreaming, adequate instruments for gender inclusion in programmes such as performance indicators
* Higher education institutions should contribute to the complex issues of gender equality through research and mainstream gender in all aspects of their functions. This might imply having to in-service educators in these institutions. Gender issues could be made compulsory modules in all institutions of higher learning just as was done for HIV/AIDS education.
* All agencies and institutions should be provided with deep theory of gender mainstreaming before they can competently implement Gm in their institutions
* There is need to understand people’s perceptions and attitude on gender issues as that is key to redressing gender inequalities (Goetz, 1995:1) stated that understanding the gendered features of institutional norms structures and practices is an important key to ensuring that women and men benefit equally from macro level policy changes. Greater steps are needed to strengthen the accountability of institutions responsible for gender mainstreaming

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